

# DOWNTOWN & JACK LONDON SQUARE

## Priority Conservation Area APPLICATION

Oakland's downtown consists of a number of elements that qualify it as a Priority Conservation Area within Urban Greening. Including Lake Merritt and stretching below the highway to Jack London Square, this vast and diverse area consists of Communities of Concern and Environmentally Disadvantaged Communities crisscrossed by freeways and dotted with old industrial land use. However, parks large and small are also in the area and major corridors capable of supporting added street trees link open space to the Bay. The Downtown & Jack London Square PCA is proposed as Urban Greening, though within this area are additional Regional Recreation and Natural Landscape PCAs applied for separately.

The PCA qualifies as Urban Greening because of its benefits to **Community Health, Climate & Resilience** and **Recreation**. It would co-benefit Water Supply & Quality.

Nearly the entire territory of the Downtown & Jack London Square PCA is considered a Community of Concern by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, defined as having a high concentration of minority and low-income residents. Of this, the City of Oakland has determined the majority has a Park Deficit (Source: Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Element of the General Plan). Therefore, it is important to conserve the few Parks within a Community of Concern, including large regional parks like Lake Merritt, and especially Parks within a Park Deficit area, usually small squares and plazas. Across from Lake Merritt is the area's only Community Garden within a Community of Concern. In addition, along the Bay just outside Jack London Square sit low income census tracts defined by the USDA as Low Income-Low Access to Food, because at least 70% of the residents must travel more than 0.5 miles to reach a healthy food source such as a grocery store. By protecting and increasing existing green space with carbon storage potential, this PCA benefits Climate and Resilience. It benefits Community Health by increasing park and food access in a Community of Concern.

Much of the Downtown & Jack London Square PCA has been defined by the California EPA as Environmentally Disadvantaged Communities, found to be in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the EnviroScreen due to their disproportionate share of pollution. Nearly half of the PCA is within a 1,000 ft. Freeway Buffer due to both the 880 and 980 Interstates. Unsurprisingly, much of this area and the downtown possess High Particulate Levels, above Bay Area Air Quality Management District thresholds as laid out in Plan Bay Area for 2040. Particularly along the waterfront, there are a number of parcels that were used for industrial purposes prior to 1968 that may contain PCBs and mercury, flagged by the Alameda County Clean Water Program for potential stormwater contamination as Old Industrial Land. A swath of properties near Jack London Square makes up a Residential Area within 300 ft. of an Industrial Zone, mapped by the City of Oakland. However, Major Urban Corridors (including the Green Streets of the Lake Merritt Station Area Specific Plan) are located in this area that connect large regional parks to the Estuary, and which require enhanced street tree plantings. Thus, this PCA presents an opportunity to

benefit Community Health and Climate & Resilience by increasing carbon storage potential through added tree cover in areas expected to experience urban heat island effect and high levels of contamination. Consisting of land along the Bay and Estuary, the Downtown & Jack London Square PCA is threatened by potential Sea Level Rise. Forecasts of a five-foot increase in sea level by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration depict inundations of most Bayfront property, including Jack London Square, and the banks of Lake Merritt. By including this area in a PCA, the City of Oakland has an opportunity to address hazard risk due to flooding / sea level rise, thereby benefiting Climate & Resilience, while conserving the important Recreation element of the San Francisco Bay Trail that runs along the shoreline. Water Supply & Quality would be a potential co-benefit because of supported watershed health around Lake Merritt.